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ABSTRACT

A study extended the investigation of readers' imaginative processes (spontaneous imagery and emotional response) to a new genre of texts: newspaper articles. A sample of 25 articles was randomly selected from a well-defined population of naturally occurring texts (articles with one or more subheadings and three to five paragraphs before the first subheading from the international section of the "New York Times"). The articles were presented with their titles and datelines and the text down to the first subheading (100-180 words). Twenty-seven undergraduates rated their responses to the story (familiarity, interest, comprehension, imagery, emotional response) on six-point Likert-type scales. Ratings on all scales demonstrated considerable variability across stories. As in previous studies with literary texts and feature journalism articles, imagery was found to be highly correlated with affective responses, and comprehension was related to both imagery and affective responses. Neither general topic nor story familiarity was related to comprehension. (Three tables of data are included; a sample story with accompanying rating scales is attached.) (Author/RS)

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Readers' Responses to Brief News Articles

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Running Head: Responses to News

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Abstract

The present study extended the investigation of readers' imaginative processes (i.e., spontaneous imagery and emotional response) to a new genre of texts: newspaper articles. A sample of 25 articles was randomly selected from a well-defined population of naturally occuring texts (i.e., articles with one or more subheading and three to five paragraphs before the first subheading from the international section of the New York Times). The articles were presented with their title and dateline and the text down to the first subheading (100-180 words). Twenty-seven undergraduates rated their response to the story (e.g., familiarity, interest, comprehension, imagery, emotional response) on six-point Likert-type scales. Ratings on all scales demonstrated considerable variability across stories. As in previous studies with literary texts and feature journalism articles, imagery was found to be highly correlated with affective responses (r=.76, .69, respectively for emotional response, story interest), and comprehension was related to both imagery and affective responses. Neither general topic nor story familiarity was related to comprehension (p>.15).

Readers' Responses to Brief News Articles

This study extends the investigation of reader response to news articles from a widely-read daily newspaper, the New York Times. Reader response studies have predominantly dealt with literature (see Goetz & Sadoski, in press, for a review), but some recent studies have expanded the investigation of reader response to include feature journalism from widely-read magazines (Sadoski & Quast, 1990) and history text adapted from biographical articles and school textbooks (Sadoski, Goetz, & Fritz, in press a, in press b). The present study builds on findings from a line of studies of reader response and extends the research to still another genre. As with the previous studies, the objective of this investigation was to explore the relationships among readers' ratings of various contributors to response, including mental imagery, affective responses (emotional response and interest), importance, familiarity, and comprehension. The generalizability of relationships between these contributors to response was of central interest.

Previous research has demonstrated some similarities and differences in response across genres. Of particular interest is the relationship between imagery and the affective responses of emotion and interest. Readers' ratings of imagery and emotional response have proven highly reliable (Goetz & Sadoski, in press). Strong and consistent relationships have been found between paragraph ratings for spontaneous mental imagery and emotional response in reading literary stories (Goetz, Sadoski, Stowe, Fetsco, & Kemp, in press; Sadoski &

Goetz, 1985; Sadoski, Goetz, & Kangiser, 1988), feature journalism articles (Sadoski & Quast, 1990), and history text (Sadoski et al., in press a, in press b). Paragraph ratings of both imagery and emotional response have been found to be moderately to highly correlated with ratings of importance of the paragraph in three literary stories (Sadoski et al., 1988; but see Sadoski & Goetz, 1985, where imagery and importance were not significantly related in another story). However, neither ratings for imagery or emotional response were found to be significantly correlated with importance ratings for paragraphs in feature journalism articles (Sadoski & Quast, 1990). This difference suggests that genre may be a factor in the relationship between importance and other aspects of reader response.

Ratings for another type of affective response, interest, have been found to be moderately to highly correlated with both imagery and comprehensibility ratings in history text (Sadoski et al., in press a, in press b). In the same study, imagery ratings were found to be highly correlated with comprehensibility ratings. Content familiarity ratings for the history texts were found to have low to insignificant relationships with ratings for imagery and comprehensibility. Differences were found for relationships between familiarity and interestingness depending on the length of the history text: For sentences (approximately 25 words), ratings for familiarity and interestingness were found to be highly correlated, but for paragraphs (approximately 100-250 words), the relationship was not significant.

The present study used all of the ratings from the studies reviewed above in the investigation of these relationships within another genre of texts, newspapers stories. Specifically, the headline, dateline, and beginning paragraphs of a random selection of newspaper stories was selected. This portion of straight news stories has a consistent structure as described by Thomas and Robinson (1982):

> First, the headline gives you the gist in an instant. Next comes the lead, the opening paragraph or two of the new stories. This lead is fact-packed - in a few lines you are told who, what, when, where, and sometimes why and how . . . . (In newspaper circles these facts are referred to as the 5 w's and the h of a straight news story.) The information in the body of a straight news story "tapers off." The details are placed in order of decreasing importance, so that the least important information is placed toward the end of the story. (p. 289)

The content of the stories was restricted to one domain, international affairs, in an effort to control for structure and style while allowing variation on a number of key dimensions judged likely to provide considerable variability on the aspects of reader response being investigated (e.g., familiarity, interest, emotional response). In addition, a new variable, writing quality, was introduced for exploratory purposes.

Method

A corpus of 50 newspaper stories was assembled by inspection of the international section of the New York Times Wednesday and Friday national editions for the period from June to August 1990. This time period was selected because events in the Persian Gulf tended to dominate the news in subsequent months. For each issue sampled, all articles that had one or more subheadings and three to five paragraphs of text (18-32 lines) prior to the first subheading were collected, producing a corpus of about 50 stories. For the purposes of this study, 25 stories were randomly selected. Any selection judged to be too closely related to a story already chosen was excluded from the sample. The stories were retyped with the title, dateline, and the text down to the first subheading. In this form, the stories range from about 100 to 180 words, excluding title and dateline.

Twenty-seven undergraduates enrolled in an educational psychology course in a large Southwestern university read and rated each story. The stories were presented in six different random orders. The ratings, on six-point Likert-type scales, tapped ten aspects of the readers' responses to the story, including familiarity, interest, comprehension, imagery, and emotional response. An example of a story with accompanying rating scales is presented in the Appendix.

Results

The full possible six-point range of ratings was used for all ten rating scales. As shown in Table 1, overall mean ratings ranged from

1.68 for story familiarity to 4.07 for story comprehension, with most scales having means around 2.5 or 3. Standard deviations for all scales were between 1.0 and 1.5. Mean ratings for each story were found by averaging across all raters. The variability of the mean story ratings for all ten scales is summarized in Table 2. Standard deviations of the story means ranged from about .3 to .7. Story familiarity and story comprehensibility, respectively, exhibited the lowest and highest minimums and maximums. Thus the stories, although presenting information that was relatively unfamiliar to the students, were judged quite understandable.

Insert Tables 1 & 2 About Here

The mean story ratings for the ten dimensions of reader response were then correlated. As shown in Table 3, there were a large number of moderate to strong correlations. With 25 observations (i.e., stories), a correlation at $r=.5$ is significant at $p<.01$. Using this criterion, 26 of the 45 correlations were significant. Several of these, however, are of special interest. As in previous studies, imagery was found to be highly correlated with affective responses ($r=.76$ for emotional response and $r=.69$ for story interest). This relationship appears to have considerable stability across other genres including literary stories, feature journalism articles, and sentences adapted from history texts. Other than the general importance of the topic, perceived importance of

the story was related only to general and story familiarity. As in previous studies with feature journalism, no significant relationship was found between either imagery or emotional response and importance ($p>.15$). Other than general interest in the topic, story interest was most closely related to emotional response, followed closely by writing quality, comprehension, and imagery. The two familiarity indices were also significantly related to story interest. Story comprehension was most strongly related to writing quality, followed by story and general interest, emotional response, and imagery. Neither general nor story familiarity was related to comprehension ($p>.15$). Neither imagery nor emotional response was related to either of the familiarity indices ($p>.15$).

Insert Table 3 About Here

Discussion

The present study extended the investigation of relationships between imagery, emotional response, and related variables (e.g., comprehension, importance, interest) to a new domain of texts while expanding the set of indices of reader response investigated (cf. Goetz et al., in press; Sadoski & Goetz, 1985; Sadoski et al. 1988; Sadoski & Quast, 1990; Sadoski et al., in press a, in press b). The use of initial segments (down to the first subheading) of newspaper articles made it possible to change the unit of analysis from the paragraph

within a text to the text, while still maintaining a good deal of ecological validity for the text units studied. The sampling procedure used to select the international news stories studied provides a more well-defined universe of texts to which to generalize, and a stronger basis for such generalization, than does most text research.

For the sample of international news articles studied, imagery and emotional response were closely related, and both were related to perceived story comprehension and interest but not to importance or familiarity. While imagery and emotional responses appear consistently related in all text genres studied thus far, the relationship between these variables and importance may be genre-specific. As with history text, imagery and affective responses were found to be significant predictors of comprehensibility, while familiarity was not. Story and general topic familiarity were related to importance and interest but not to comprehensibility. The pattern of relationships observed is consistent with the results of previous studies employing short stories, magazine articles, and sentences adapted from history texts, and may be viewed as supportive of dual coding theory (e.g., Paivio, 1971, 1986; Sadoski, Paivio, & Goetz, 1991). Further research to specify these patterns with other genres is warranted.

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Table 1

Overall Rating Means and Standard Deviations

	Mean	SD
1. General Familiarity	1.97	1.28
2. Story Familiarity	1.68	1.00
3. General Importance	3.24	1.33
4. Story Importance	3.03	1.28
5. General Interest	3.02	1.34
6. Story Interest	2.99	1.37
7. Writing Quality	3.68	1.18
8. Story Comprehension	4.07	1.30
9. Story Imagery	2.79	1.44
10. Story Emotional Response	2.45	1.29

Table 2

Minimums, Maximums, and Standard Deviations

of Mean Story Ratings

		Minimum	Maximum	SD
1.	General Familiarity	1.30	3.11	0.51
2.	Story Familiarity	1.19	2.48	0.33
3.	General Importance	2.26	4.22	0.60
4.	Story Importance	2.19	3.81	0.56
5.	General Interest	2.11	3.62	0.44
6.	Story Interest	2.15	3.74	0.45
7.	Writing Quality	2.81	4.30	0.39
8.	Story Comprehension	2.96	4.85	0.50
9.	Story Imagery	1.85	4.81	0.71
10.	Story Emotional Response	1.85	3.93	0.48

Table 3

Correlations between Mean Story Ratings

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. General Familiarity	1.00	.95	.70	.64	.73	.56	.33	.28	.01	.20
2. Story Familiarity	.95	1.00	.62	.58	.69	.58	.31	.28	.08	.25
3. General Importance	.70	.62	1.00	.96	.49	.34	.28	.11	-.29	.18
4. Story Importance	.64	.58	.96	1.00	.49	.37	.32	.07	-.26	.22
5. General Interest	.73	.69	.49	.49	1.00	.93	.65	.65	.54	.70
6. Story Interest	.56	.58	.34	.37	.93	1.00	.75	.75	.69	.82
7. Writing Quality	.33	.31	.28	.32	.65	.75	1.00	.90	.52	.57
8. Story Comprehension	.28	.28	.11	.07	.65	.75	.90	1.00	.65	.54
9. Story Imagery	.01	.08	-.29	-.26	.54	.69	.52	.65	1.00	.76
10. Story Emotional Response	.20	.25	.18	.22	.70	.82	.57	.54	.76	1.00

APPENDIX

Bodly, Duvalier Bullies Step From the Shadows

Port-Au-Prince, Haiti, July 14 - To hear Claude Raymond tell it, he is just one of several democratically inclined candidates who pin their hopes for an end to chaos here on elections in November.

Mr. Raymond, 60 years old, is a former Interior Minster and head of the Presidential Guard of Francois Duvalier. Mr Raymond seems to take umbrage whenever questions are raised about his involvement in political violence, including the massacre of 34 voters by a death squad during the aborted elections in November 1987.

"I don't want arms at all in my camp," he said in an interview in the office of a former hotel, where he lives. As two dozen rough-hewn, bored-looking men sat in the lobby area outside, he said, " I have been attacked too many times to tolerate the presence of arms in my entourage."

Mr. Raymond and a group of other hard-liners from the Duvalier dictatorship have emerged from the shadows of exile or extreme discretion in which they have spent most of the last four years, since the fall of Mr. Duvalier's son and successor, Jean-Claude.

1.	How familiar are you with the general topic to which this story relates?	1 very unfamiliar	2	3	4	5	6 very familiar
2.	How familiar are you with the specific facts reported in this story?	1 very unfamiliar	2	3	4	5	6 very familiar
3.	How important do you find the general topic to which this story relates?	1 very unimportant	2	3	4	5	6 very important
4.	How important did you find this story?	1 very unimportant	2	3	4	5	6 very important
5.	How interested were you in the general topic to which this story relates?	1 very uninterested	2	3	4	5	6 very interested
6.	How interested were you in this story?	1 very uninterested	2	3	4	5	6 very interested
7.	How well written did you find this story?	1 very poorly written	2	3	4	5	6 very well written
8.	How understandable did you find this story?	1 very hard to understand	2	3	4	5	6 very easy to understand
9.	How much imagery did you experience while reading this story?	1 none at all	2	3	4	5	6 very much
10.	How much of an emotional response did you experience while reading this story?	1 none at all	2	3	4	5	6 very much